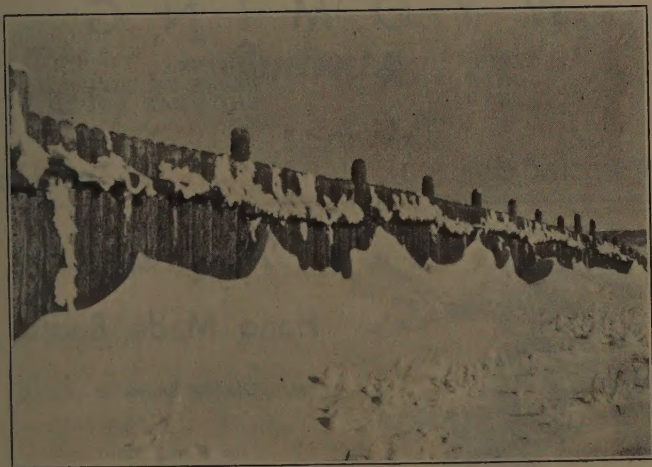


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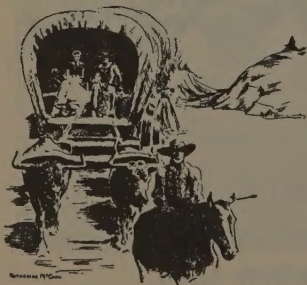
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The Life and Adventures of John Colter

By DR. E. B. TRAIL

John Colter, the famous explorer and trapper who first discovered the region now known as the Yellowstone National Park, spent the last years of his life in Franklin County, Missouri, and died at Dundee, Missouri, in November, 1813. Dr. Trail's careful research has brought to light many facts and traditions relative to Colter's heroic life and untimely death.

One day in May, 1810, a little dug-out canoe, paddled into port by a single navigator, landed at St. Louis. The coming of this canoe and its navigator was unheralded and very little thought of at the time of his arrival. This man had just completed a vast journey from the mountains in his canoe, and his coming marked the true ending of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. John Colter, one of the greatest explorers and master woodsman of the West, and the most celebrated member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, had finally returned from the wilderness.

The first record we have of John Colter is at Maysville, Kentucky, where on October 15, 1803, he enlisted as a private in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Captain Lewis was picking his men carefully. He well knew that the great task before him required men of splendid physical ability and great courage. Sergeant Patrick Gass, in his journals of the expedition, cites instances of the very high qualifications a man had to possess to be considered by Captain Lewis. Of the many who offered, few were chosen. The record Colter left behind proves that Captain Lewis used rare good judgment on the day he signed Colter for the great journey to the Pacific Ocean.

Birth of John Colter

We believe that John Colter was born in Virginia and journeyed into Kentucky while a young man. Two celebrated men of early Kentucky—Simon Kenton and Louis Wetzell—

lived at Maysville. Looking for some motive for Colter's decision to join Captain Lewis on his great adventure, we conjecture that Colter had been fired by the great and glowing accounts of the deeds of these two noted frontiersmen in the winning of Kentucky, and that he accepted his enlistment as his chance to satisfy his desire for adventure. He lived to have his desire satisfied in the fullest measure and only by rarest good fortune did he live to tell the tale in many hairbreadth escapes.

The record of John Colter with Lewis and Clark is a meritorious one. The journal bears testimony to this fact. "Colter, in his physical attributes also, was well fitted for the wilderness. Above the common height; powerful of frame, physically quick, alert, enduring; a fine shot, he was the ideal frontiersman, patient and loyal he must likewise have been, for the scores of references to him in the Lewis and Clark Journals show he performed his duties faithfully and well. Not a hint of an act of meanness, selfishness or bad temper is there recorded against him."

His Place in History

Colter deserves his place in history, if for no other reason that he was one of the high-class men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. "The celebrated performance stands as incomparably the most perfect achievement of its kind in the history of the world." Another historian sums up his conception of the expedition in these words: "In the history of ex-

plorations, with the possible exception of Alexander McKenzie's wonderful tour across the continent, this expedition must ever stand pre-eminent." After Colter finished with Lewis and Clark, he started on a career in the west that reads like the impossible, yet he survived and lived to reach St. Louis in May, 1810.

Trapper

Above Fort Mandan (North Dakota) the Lewis and Clark Expedition, on the homeward bound journey, met two trappers that were making their way up the Missouri and the Yellowstone to trap for beaver. These men—Joseph Dixon and Forrest Handcock—had made the long journey up the Missouri and were nearing the Yellowstone. They decided to return with the expedition to the Moudan villages. Colter, hearing their plans, decided to join them.

"When Lewis and Clark reached Fort Mandan on their return journey in 1806, Colter appealed to them to be relieved from further service in order that he might remain in the country and trap for beaver." The incident is thus recorded in the journal under the date of August 15 and 16, 1806.

"In the evening we were applied to by one of our men. Colter, who was desirous of joining the two trappers, who had accompanied us, now proposed an expedition up the river, in which they were to find traps and give him a share of the profits. The offer was a very advantageous one, and, as he had always performed his duty, and his services might be dispensed with, we agreed that he might go, provided none of the rest would ask or expect a similar indulgence. To this they cheerfully answered that they wished Colter every success and would not apply for liberty to separate before we reached St. Louis. We therefore supplied him, as did his comrades, also, with powder, lead and a variety of articles which might be useful to him, and he left us the next day."

Colter's decision to go back to the wilderness seemed to form a deep im-

pression on the expedition. But he was going back. The Biddle journal continues:

"The example of this man shows us how easily men may be weaned from the habits of civilized life to the ruder, but scarcely less fascinating manners of the woods. This hunter has now been absent for many years from the frontier, and might naturally be presumed to have some anxiety, or some curiosity at least, to return to his friends or his country; yet just at the moment when he is approaching the frontiers, he is tempted by a hunting scheme to give up those delightful prospects, and go back without the least reluctance to the solitude of the woods."

Swallowed by the Wilderness

Colter, after he left the Maudans, to go back up the river with Dixon and Handcock, was swallowed by wilderness until the spring of 1807. Just where his wanderings led him we do not know. He next comes to light coming down the Missouri river alone in a little canoe in the spring of 1807, and had made his way safely to the mouth of the Platte river. Manuel Lisa had reached this point with a large band of trappers and several boats on his way from St. Louis to the headwaters of the Missouri. His greatest need was a guide, familiar with the western country, to lead his expedition. Imagine his surprise and delight at meeting Colter at the mouth of the Platte. Once more, it is recorded, Colter was persuaded to give up thoughts of home and his people, and return for the third time to the wilderness. He set his own little canoe adrift and accompanied Lisa up the river. "A chance meeting with Lisa caused him to reverse his course and led to those final and crowded years of peril and adventure during which his discoveries were achieved." Colter finally led the Lisa expedition into the Big Horn River, where they established their port. They reached this point November 21, 1807. They named this port, "Manuel's Fort." It stood near the mouth of the Big Horn River.

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Traps for Manuel Lisa

Lisa now looked about for a man to make a long journey into the surrounding country to establish contact with the different Sudion tribes for the purpose of inducing them to come to his port on the Big Horn so that he might purchase their furs and to gain information from them that would lead him to the best trapping grounds. Colter was selected as the best qualified man in the fort to make this long and dangerous journey. Winter was on in earnest—intense cold and deep snow were added to the many obstacles that beset the way of this lonely traveler. No doubt Colter was compelled to use snowshoes as much of his journey would have been impossible without their aid. Snow, ice and cold never daunted him, for it is known that he made several trips from Manuel's Fort on the Big Horn to the Three Forks—a distance of some 300 miles—during the bitter cold of the Montana winters.

Colter now set out from Manuel's Fort on his long and perilous journey. This journey was to be one of the great achievements in the life of John Colter. "This man with a pack of thirty pounds weight, his gun, and some ammunition, went upward of 500 miles to the Crow nation; gave them information, and proceeded thence to several other tribes. During this journey he discovered the world's greatest wonderland—The Yellowstone National Park. While traveling with a party of Crow Indians, they were attacked by a band of roving Blackfeet. In the fight that followed, Colter was badly wounded in the leg, but concealing himself, continued to fire at the Blackfeet until they were routed. Being wounded, he now looked for the shortest route back to Manuel's Fort, and it is recorded that "He returned to the establishment entirely alone and without assistance several hundred miles."

This journey of this lone adventurer is a gem in the history of American exploration, and John Colter surely deserves his rightful place in the history of his country.

Goes to the Three Forks

During the late summer or early fall of 1808, Colter left Manuel's Fort on the Big Horn for a trapping expedition to the Three Forks of the Missouri river. His companion on this trip was John Potts, who also had been a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Potts, no doubt, had also been unable to resist the charm of the wilderness, and here we find him setting out with Colter on a trapping expedition into the very heart of the Blackfoot Indian country. The Blackfeet, fierce and warlike, had formed a terrible hatred for the white man, and showed him no quarter. Visualize Colter and Potts going into this extremely dangerous territory, risking their lives every moment for the mere trapping of beaver. Potts gave up his life—literally hacked to pieces by the Blackfeet. Colter made a marvelous escape and lived to tell the tale.

Arriving at the Three Forks, Colter and Potts established themselves and started trapping for beaver. They chose the Jefferson river, the most western of the Three Forks. They would silently paddle up the stream after sundown and set their traps. In the morning they would visit the traps, remove the catch and return to their camp before daybreak. During the day they would lie concealed so not to be discovered by the Blackfeet. Early one morning they heard a great noise approaching. Colter was for instant flight. Potts ridiculed him—accusing him of being a coward, and stating that the noise was caused by buffalos. Shortly afterward a band of about 800 Blackfeet warriors appeared and beckoned them to come ashore. Colter craftily slipped the beaver traps over the side of the canoe when he first sighted the Indians and allowed them to sink to the bottom and rest on the gravel in shallow water.

"As retreat was now impossible, Colter turned the head of his canoe to the shore, and, at the moment of its touching, an Indian seized the rifle belonging to Potts, but Colter

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immediately retook it and handed it to Potts, who remained in the canoe, and, on receiving it, pushed off into the river. He had scarcely quitted the shore when an arrow was shot at him and he cried out, 'Colter, I am wounded!' Colter remonstrated with him on the folly of attempting to escape, and urged him to come ashore. Instead of complying, he instantly levelled his rifle at an Indian, and shot him dead on the spot. This conduct may appear to be an act of madness; but it was doubtless the effect of sudden and sound reasoning, for, if taken alive he must have expected to be tortured to death, according to their custom. He was instantly pierced with arrows so numerous that to use the language of Colter, 'he was made a riddle of.' He was hacked to pieces and his heart, lungs and entrails were thrown into Colter's face.

First Race for Life

"They now seized Colter, stripping him entirely naked, and began to consult on the manner in which he should be put to death. They were first inclined to set him up as a mark to shoot at, but the chief interfered, and, seizing him by the shoulder, asked him if he could run fast. Colter, who had been some time among the Keekatsa or Crow Indians, had in a considerable degree acquired the Blackfeet language and was well acquainted with Indian customs. He knew that he now had to run for his life, with the dreadful odds of five of six hundred against him—those armed Indians."

Colter cunningly replied to the old chief that he was a poor runner. This ruse, conceived in the fertile mind of Colter, was soon to be capitalized into a magnificent try for his life. The Indians discarded everything, adjusted their leggings and moccasins, and prepared for the race. Naturally, Colter would be expected to try to make the timber along the stream in order to elude his pursuers. But he had planned otherwise. He knew he was fast. Instead of speeding for the thickets along the stream, he resolved

on another, seemingly impossible plan of escape.

"The chief now commanded the party to remain stationary, and led Colter out upon the prairie, three or four hundred yards and released him, bidding him to save himself if he could. At that instant the horrid war-whoop sounded in the ears of poor Colter, who, urged by hope, ran at a speed which surprised himself." But he did not run for cover. Unexpectedly, he sped out over the open plain and headed for the Jefferson, six miles away. Wonderfully resourceful, Colter reasoned that this was his only chance of survival. He was literally challenging the whole army of Blackfeet in cunning and running ability. Such was the courage of Colter. He proceeded toward the Jefferson Fork, having to cross a plain over six miles in width, abounding with prickly pear, on which he was every instant treading with his naked feet. He ran nearly half way across the plain before he ventured to look over his shoulder, when he perceived that the Indians were very much scattered and that he had gained ground to a considerable distance from the main body; but one Indian who carried a spear was much before all the rest, and not more than a hundred yards from him. A faint gleam of hope now cheered the heart of Colter. He derived confidence from the belief that escape was within the bounds of possibility; but that confidence was nearly proving fatal to him, for he exerted himself to such a degree that blood gushed from his nostrils and soon almost covered the forepart of his body. He had now arrived within a mile of the river, when he distinctly heard the appalling sound of footsteps behind him, and every instant expected to feel the spear of his pursuer. Again he turned his head and saw the savage not twenty yards from him. Determined, if possible, to avoid the expected blow, he suddenly stopped, turned around, and spread out his arms. The Indian, surprised at this sudden action, and perhaps at the bloody appearance of Colter,



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also attempted to stop; but, exhausted with running, he fell while endeavoring to throw his spear, which stuck in the ground and broke in his hand. Colter immediately snatched up the pointed part, with which he pinned him to the earth and continued his flight."

Colter Eludes Indians

"The foremost of the Indians, on arriving at the place, stopped till the others came up to join him, when they set up a hideous yell. Every moment of this time was improved by Colter, who, though fainting and exhausted, succeeded in gaining the skirting of the cottonwood trees on the border of the park, through which he ran and plunged into the river. Fortunately for him, a little below this place was an island, against the upper point of which a raft of drift timber had lodged. He dived under the raft and after several efforts got his head above water among the trunks of the trees, covered over with smaller wood to the depth of several feet. Scarcely had he secured himself when the Indians arrived on the river, screeching and yelling, as Colter expressed it, "like so many devils."

They were frequently on the raft during the day, and were seen thru the chunks by Colter, who was congratulating himself upon his escape until the idea arose that they might set the raft on fire. In horrible suspense he remained until night, when, hearing no more of the Indians, he dived from under the raft, swam silently down the river for a long distance when he landed and traveled all night. Although happy in having escaped from the Indians, his situation was still dreadful. He was completely naked under a burning sun. The soles of his feet were entirely filled with the thorns of the prickly pears. He was hungry and had no means of killing game, although he saw abundance around him."

A Race With Starvation

Manuel's Fort on the Big Horn was some 300 miles away and now

the race between Colter and starvation commenced. Above him on the river lay the pass through the mountains, but, fearful that the Indians would guard the pass and intercept him there, he decided to scale the mountains and descend into the plain on the other side.

"Colter ascended the almost perpendicular mountain before him, the tops and side of which a great way down, were covered with perpetual snow. He clambered up this fearful ascent about four miles below the gap, holding on by the rocks, shrubs and brushes of trees, and by morning had reached the top. He lay there concealed all that day, and at night proceeded on in the descent of the mountain, which he accomplished by dawn. He now hastened on in the open plain towards Manuel's Fort on the Big Horn, about 300 miles ahead in the northeast. He traveled day and night, stopping only for necessary repose, and eating roots and the bark of trees for eleven days. He reached the fort nearly exhausted by hunger, fatigue and excitement."

When Colter reached the end of his journey he was in such a dismal plight that none of the company at the fort knew him until he made himself known. He spent the remainder of the summer at the fort recuperating, and when winter came on decided on another journey. It seems that Colter had worried about the loss of his beaver traps while resting and regaining his strength and he now planned to return to the Jefferson Fork and regain them if possible. Supposing the Indians were all quiet in winter quarters, he set out thru the deep snow and cold for the Three Forks, which he reached safely in due time. Passing thru the gap in the mountains, he encamped in the bank of the stream, built a fire and was cooking his buffalo meat, contemplating, no doubt, that tomorrow he would regain his traps and be on his way back to Manuel's Fort on the Big Horn. Presently he heard the cracking of brush behind him, and heard the cocking of guns.

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Second Race for Life

Colter, quick as a flash, leaped over the fire as the bullets whizzed about him and scattered the coals of his fire. "Again he fled for his life, and the second time ascended the perpendicular mountain which he had gone upon his former flight, fearing now as then, that the pass might be guarded by Indians. He reached the top before morning, and, resting for the day, descended the next night and then made his way with all possible speed to the fort." He said that at the time he promised God Almighty that he would never return to this region if he were only permitted to escape once more with his life.

Traveling 600 miles thru the snow and cold, this must have been a terrible journey. Colter seems to have had an uncanny way of sustaining himself and of overcoming the greatest obstacles that ever confronted him. It seems that other men associated with him failed to measure up to his standard of resistance to the many perils that beset them, and as a consequence gave up their lives.

Colter's Weakness

John Colter had one weakness—he could not stay away from the region of the Three Forks. This region at that time was probably the finest beaver grounds that the vast western country could boast, and the keen perception of Colter, no doubt, instinctively led him into this virgin beaver paradise. He wanted beaver, and the beaver he wanted seemed to be on the Three Forks.

For quite a long time after Colter made his second escape from the Blackfeet on the Three Forks, he led the life of an active trapper. In the early months of 1810, Colter broke faith with his promise to his Maker. About the first of March, 1810, Colter, as guide, led a party of 32 men out of Manuel's Fort and led them westward—destination, Three Forks. They soon encountered deep snow and the traveling was very difficult. The drifts are said to have been fifty to sixty feet deep. During this journey

they all suffered severely from snow-blindness. While totally blind at mid-day, a body of Snake Indians came among them, but did not molest them in any way. Slowly regaining their sight, they proceeded on. "Through Colter's guidance the party finally reached the Three Forks on April 3, 1810, and Colonel Menard at once began the erection of a fort."

Thomas James was with this band. Colter took him and several of the other trappers over the ground, where he had made his famous race for life against the Blackfeet and James comments on the visit as follows: "As we passed over the ground where Colter ran his race and listened to his story, an indefinable fear crept over all. We felt awe-struck by the nameless and numerous dangers that evidently beset us on every side. Even Cheek's courage sunk and his heretofore buoyant and cheerful spirit was depressed at hearing of the perils of the place. He spoke despairingly and his mind was uneasy, restless and fearful. 'I am afraid,' said he, 'and I acknowledge it. I never felt fear before, but now I feel it.' A melancholy that seemed like a presentment of his own fate, possessed him, and to us he was serious almost to sadness, until he met his death a few days afterward from the same Blackfeet from whom Colter escaped."

James continues: "Colter was now again in the same country, courting the same dangers which he had so often braved, and that seemed to have for him a kind of fascination. Such men, and there are thousands of such, can only live in a constant state of action. Perils and danger are their natural element and their familiarity with them and indifference to their fate are well illustrated in these adventures of Colter."

The band of trappers at Menard's Fort on the Three Forks knew they were in dangerous territory. Cheek was killed a few days after Colter had related the story of his race. At the same time, Colter had another narrow escape, but gained the fort and safety. Throwing his hat on the

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ground, Colter said: "If God will only forgive me this time and let me off I will leave this country day after tomorrow and be d—d if I ever come into it again."

Ends Career in the Far West

Colter kept his promise. In company with two other men he started for the Big Horn. They were attacked by the Blackfeet but escaped. They traveled at night, lying concealed in the day time and finally reached the Big Horn and Manuel's Fort in safety. Colter had sensed the inevitable.

Life, as Colter lived it, meant death. Reasoning thus, he left, and, "Hurried down the Missouri to St. Louis by canoe, making the trip in thirty days and arriving at the end of this record voyage in May, 1810." This is the end of the career of heroic John Colter in the far west.

Estimate

John Colter stands on his record today as the most celebrated explorer of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. No member of that historic and celebrated expedition ever returned out of the Missouri river with a record of exploration and adventure to compare with his. His sublime courage and unbelievable endurance displayed in his great escape from the Blackfeet stamps that feat as the great classic of the escapes of white men from the Indians of America. His magnificent courage and endurance led him to be chosen for a perilous trip into the solitudes. From this lonely journey he returned as the discoverer of that matchless wonderland—The Yellowstone National Park. Practically forgotten in the land where he died, he is today emerging from an unmarked and unknown grave, to rightfully take his place among the heroic explorers of the great West.

Seeks Judgment Against the Estate of Captain Lewis

Just how long Colter stayed in St. Louis after his arrival in the spring of 1810, we do not know, but we do

know that while residing in St. Louis, he was busy trying to obtain money from the estate of Captain Meriwether Lewis and from Thomas James, who at that time, we believe, lived somewhere in Illinois. He obtained a judgment against the estate of Captain Lewis for \$377.60, but Colter never obtained any of this amount because of the insolvency of the estate. If we remember correctly, one of the old documents on record at the Probate Court in St. Louis, does credit Thomas James with a payment to Colter. Presumably Colter arrived back in the haunts of civilization with little or no funds but quickly realized that money was of prime necessity to his existence in the city, as his rifle would no longer answer the demands for a livelihood.

In all probability Colter soon tired of conditions as they were in St. Louis and determined to move back up the Missouri river, where he might trap and lead the free, open life that was so dear to him.

Colter in Dundee

We next hear of John Colter at Dundee and we now enter the vale of mystery that concealed Colter's life at Dundee until his death, and which still guards most of the record of his life at that place with a deep silence which will not give up the secrets of the departed. Working faithfully to discover and bring to light some accurate record of Colter's life at Dundee, we find, from want of almost no written records, that we must depend largely upon tradition. While enabled to follow Colter fairly accurately during his life in the far west by the written records of those times, we have found a directly opposite condition in tracing him at Dundee. Here he fades from view, and, outside of the record of his interview by Bradbury, has practically left no written trace of his life at that place.

Tradition has it that Colter came to Boeuf (LaBoeuf) Creek to trap for beaver, arriving there in 1810. "In 1811, Colter lived on Boeuf Creek near the house of Sullins in St. Louis

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county." Near the place which was once the home of Zacharias Sullins, there is a fine spring of water that flows from the base of the hill that forms the east side of Boeuf Creek Valley, and after flowing a short distance, empties into Boeuf Creek which is nearby. After carefully going over the available evidence, we believe Colter lived near this fine spring of water which is known as the Sullins Spring." The bottom land adjacent to this spring was of the very finest to be had and, no doubt, here Colter turned farmer during the summer and pursued his trapping in due season.

Marriage

Colter was married while living at Dundee. No record is available giving the maiden name of his wife, but in all probability her given name was Sally. On one document on file at Union, Mo., having to do with settlement of the estate of John Colter, she has had her name signed Loucy Coulter over her mark, which indicates she was probably unable to write her name. Her second given name may have been Loucy and she may have used this name in signing the document above referred to. The evidence still stands that her given name was Sally. She afterwards married James Brown. Salley Colter never knew or never dreamed of the fame that her first husband, John Colter, would fall heir to many years after his death. She has left no record of his life at Dundee and no known record of his grave.

John Colter left one known child—a son named Hiram. We have located a little Testament that has been handed down through the Colter family, bearing the signature of this Hiram Colter. This little testament bears the publisher's date of 1835, and the faded but visible signature of Hiram Colter, claimed by his descendants to have been the son, and only known child of John Colter, who was with Lewis and Clark. Full documentary evidence proving the above is lacking, but the traditional record is so well founded, and so well known

to us that we accept it as fact in this case.

The children of Hiram Colter were: Joseph, John, Absolam, Nathaniel, William, James, Lucy and one other daughter, who afterwards became a Mrs. Davis. The Colter family is a very prolific one. Several of the descendants of Hiram Colter still live in Franklin county. Establishing a family tree of the Colters is possible to one highly interested and willing to put forth the necessary effort.

Meets Hunt's Party

March 12, 1811, the Wilson P. Hunt party left St. Louis bound for the Columbia river. With them was John Bradbury, an English naturalist. He was commissioned by the Botanical Society of Liverpool, England, to come to America to make researches and gather specimens. He had attached himself to this expedition as it offered splendid opportunity to fulfill his mission. Bradbury kept a journal from which we quote—(March 17, 1811)—“We encamped at the mouth of a creek called Boeuf, near the house of one Sullens, I enquired of Sullens for John Colter, one of Lewis and Clark's party, whom General Clark had mentioned to me as being able to point out the place on the Missouri where the petrified skeleton of a fish, about forty feet long, had been found. Sullens informed me that Colter lived about a mile from us, and sent his son to inform him of our arrival, but we did not see him that evening.”

March 18, 1811—“At daybreak Sullens came to our camp, and informed us that Colter would be with us in a few minutes. Shortly after he arrived, but could not give me the information I wished for. He seemed to have a great inclination to accompany the expedition, but having been lately married, he reluctantly took leave of us.”

John Sullens lived on Dubois Creek in 1799—later he moved to Boeuf Creek, where he owned two slaves. According to Ben Bailey, John Sullens settled on the present Ben Bailey

farm and lived near the spot where Mr. Bailey now has his home. John Sullens came in and settled here in 1800, according to the testimony of Ben Bailey, which we accept as correct.

Coming back to Bradbury, we find him camped at the mouth of Boeuf Creek. He recorded in his journal the day before that the water was high. The Missouri river, at normal stage of water, flowed on the north side of Boeuf Island, making a long bend and again came back to the southern chain of bluffs about where New Haven now stands. A chute ran on the south side of Boeuf Island and made a big “cut-off” for boatmen, when there was a good stage of water. No doubt the Hunt party had started through this chute and had encamped for the night at the point where Boeuf Creek emptied into this chute, which, we are reasonably sure was at a point a short distance below Dundee, and near the house of John Sullens. Bradbury states that John Colter lived about a mile from this place. The Sullens spring is about a mile from Dundee. Summing up, it seems that if Colter lived a mile from Dundee and that he “lived on Boeuf Creek near the house of Sullens” he must have lived near Zacharius Sullens' house, which was near the Sullens spring. Presumably it was the son of John Sullens that was sent to the home of Colter to inform him of the arrival of the Hunt party and the wish of John Bradbury to consult him, and we infer from the scout records available that John Colter lived near the Sullens spring on Boeuf Creek.

The record in the Bradbury journal of his meeting with Colter at the mouth of Boeuf Creek is one of the few written records that shed any light on Colter's life at Dundee, and Washington Irving comments upon this meeting as follows: “The next morning early, as the party were yet encamped at the mouth of a small stream, they were visited by another of those heroes of the wilderness, one John Colter, who had accompanied Lewis and Clark in their memorable

expedition. He had recently made one of those vast internal voyages so characteristic of this fearless class of men, and of the immense regions over which they hold their lonely wanderings; having come from the headwaters of the Missouri to St. Louis in a small canoe. This distance of 3,000 miles he had accomplished in thirty days. Colter kept with the party all morning. He had many particulars to give them concerning the Blackfeet Indians, a restless and predatory tribe, who had conceived an implacable hostility to the white man, in consequence of one of their warriors having been killed by Captain Lewis, while attempting to steal horses. Through the country infested by these savages the expedition would have to proceed, and Colter in reiterating the precautions that ought to be observed respecting them. He had, himself, experienced their vindictive cruelty, and his story deserves particular citation as showing the hairbreadth adventures to which these solitary rovers of the wilderness are exposed."

"Such is a sample of the rugged experience which Colter had to relate of savage life; yet, with all these perils and terrors fresh in his recollection, he could not see the present band on their way to these regions of danger and adventure, without feeling a vehement impulse to join them.

"A Western trapper is like a sailor; past hazards only stimulate him to further risks, the vast prairie is to one what the ocean is to the other, a boundless field of enterprise and exploit. However he may have suffered in his last cruise, he is always ready to join a new expedition; and the more adventurous its nature, the more attractive it is to his vagrant spirit."

"Nothing seems to have kept Colter from continuing with the party to the shores of the Pacific, but the circumstances of his having recently married. All the morning he kept with them, balancing in his mind the charms of his bride against those of

the Rocky Mountains, the former, however, prevailed, and after a march of several miles, he took a reluctant leave of the travelers, and turned his face homeward."

Apparently, the Bradbury record is the last written account we have of Colter until after his death.

The Lisa Expedition of 1811 was accompanied by Henry M. Brockenridge. The entry in his journal under date of April 8, 1811, states: "At this place (Lower point of Boeuf Island) the river makes a considerable bend. Instead of taking the main channel, we entered a small one between the island and the shore, which will shorten the distance; the current is not so strong. The channel is about fifty yards wide, and very handsome, having clean, even banks and resembling a small river. It is about four miles in length." Brockenridge gives us a vivid view of this chute that ran on the south shore of Boeuf Island. Stage of water permitting, boats used this chute as it saved making the long bend around Boeuf Island. Brockenridge does not record a meeting with Colter, but his record lends assurance that the Hunt party also passed this way on their trip up the river as they also had a good stage of water.

Feared by Indians

Tradition gleaned from the Coiters tells us that John Colter was greatly feared by the Indians. He killed many of them in his time. No single Indian would dare engage him in combat. He always placed his victims or victims in a conspicuous place, and in an upright position if possible. This was his method to appraise the other Indians of the fact that Colter had done the killing. This was a dire warning. He claimed this method put a deadly fear into the heart of the Indian and proved to them that he had no fear. It is said that he had accounted for one hundred and one Indians at the time of his death. Tradition this is, and, if correct, Colter took a dreadful toll of the Indians.

Death

John Colter died at Dundee, Missouri, in November, 1813. Thomas James says that a few years after his (James) return he heard of Colter's death from jaundice. "We only know that in running away from his savage foes he soon fell victim of that dread enemy from whom no one escapes." This, from the pen of General Chittenden, probably infers that he fell victim to tuberculosis. Jaundice is generally accepted as the cause of his death. The required legal notice relative to the administration of his estate was published in the Missouri Gazette, December 11, 1813.

The inventory of his estate, which we found in a fairly good state of preservation, and which is a very interesting old document is still preserved in the probate records at St. Louis. Dundee was in Labaddie Township, St. Louis county, during the time of Colter. This accounts for the administration of his estate in St. Louis county, and of the filing of the records at St. Louis.

The inventory lists his property and places its value at \$229.41. Three histories are listed in the inventory. This fact, coupled with that of Colter being able to write his name (his original signature still exists) leads us to believe that he was somewhat of a literate man.

His property was sold at public auction. The sale bill, which we have copied carefully from the original, throws a faint light on the otherwise unknown record of his last days:

December 10, 1813

Sale Bill	\$	c
Hartley Sappington		
One pot and pothooks.....	4	00
John Simpson		
One Dutch oven.....	3	87
James Higgins		
One weeding hoe.....	1	43½
Zachariah Surlans		
One plow irons.....	8	

Wm. Greenstreet—One dish and five puter plates.....	8	37½
John Morrow		
Two tie pans.....	2	25
James Higgins		
One puter bason.....	3	50
William Greenstreet		
One puter bason.....	3	50
John Wollums		
One puter bason.....	1	62½
Enoch Greenstreet		
One coffey pot.....	1	62½
John Wollums		
One little spinning wheel..	7	12½
Hartley Sappington		
Glass tumbler	0	85
Samuel Cantley		
One bottle	0	37½
Mosias Maupin		
One bottle	0	50
James Higgins		
Knives, forks and spoons....	2	12½
James Higgins		
For tin cups	1	85
Wm. Greenstreet		
One piggan	0	68
Wm. Greenstreet		
Four chairs	2	60
Michal Early		
One feather bed.....	22	00
John Morrow		
One feather bed.....	17	00
James Higgins		
One pane of cotton cards..	10	37½
Benjamin Heathley		
One book	0	64
Mosias Maupin		
One book	1	75
Samuel Cantley		
One book	0	86
James Higgins		
One flat iron	2	75
Hartley Sappington		
One mare	42	75
William Davis		
One colt	16	50
William Davis		
One heffer	7	26½
James Higgins		
One cow and calf.....	9	00

John Sullins—article is completely obliterated.....	5	62½
Name and article also completely obliterated	2	00
	—	—
	124	44½

Daniel Richardson,
Administrator.

We now know that he was a farmer, and assuming his declining health, he probably put forth his best effort to sustain his family. Unknown to the world, this, no doubt, was the last and greatest struggle John Colter ever faced, and the one in which he finally lost.

"Tunnel Hill," so named because of the fact of its being pierced by a tunnel, is a beautiful bluff overlooking the Missouri river. It lies just west of Dundee—close up to the river, which now washes it base. Old settlers living along the river almost always located their burial grounds on the bluffs, as the Indians had done before them. It is only natural to assume that John Colter was laid to rest in one of these early burial grounds on one of the bluffs nearby. We do not know where the grave of John Colter is. It is unknown and unmarked. About two years after Colter's death, his widow married James Brown. She left no known record of his grave. Hiram Colter, which well founded traditional and documentary records calls his son, left no known records relative to his father, or to the whereabouts of his grave. Hiram Colter seems to have inherited some of the roving propensities of his father, and left Dundee probably sometime prior to 1840. Members of the Colter family say he settled on the Berger Fork Creek in an early day, near the home where Christ Humburg now lives. Christ Humburg has a faint recollection of the old Colter log cabin and says it was tumbling down when he was a boy and was infested with snakes. Hiram Colter afterwards moved away to Beemont. What he knew of his father is a blank to us.

The affidavit of Sam Colter is self-explanatory: "State of Missouri, County of Gasconade, ss.

"This is to certify that I, Sam Colter, of New Haven, Missouri, R.F.D., hereby under oath make the following statement:

"About 1883, I was talking with Mr. Jacob Krattli of Dundee, Missouri. He told me that sometime prior to this time he had been talking to a group of old-time settlers at Dundee, Missouri, and that they had told him that John Colter, the famous trapper and guide, was buried on Tunnel Hill. (Seal) SAM COULTER,

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 1st day of November, 1926, A. D.

WM. D. SCHAFFNER,
Notary Public.

My term expires July 3, 1930."

Here we have the only clue as to where John Colter lies buried. Jacob Krattli was a man of highest integrity and told the truth. Sam Colter, well on the shady side of life, is and does no less. Knowing these men as we do, we accept this record as the best and only one in existence. None other could be found.

During the summer of 1926 the Missouri Pacific railroad opened an immense cut through Tunnel Hill. Several graves were unearthed. Since 1850, several known men have been buried on the summit of this hill. Relating the story of Colter's supposed last resting place on this hill to the men employed in the excavation, we questioned them carefully as to the probability of finding and identifying the grave of Colter. They unearthed several graves but found no identification leading to a discovery of the grave of Colter. The huge steam shovel working at night, possibly scooped up several graves bodily and emptied the contents into the dump cars unobserved. The foreman in charge said he was confident this happened. There is a possibility that the few fragments of the bones of John Colter now lie imbedded in the new embankment of the Missouri Pacific railroad.

Nothing possessed by John Colter has ever come down through the family to the present day. Some article possessed by him would have rich historic value, and be a highly prized heritage. At present we believe all trace of anything that belonged to Colter is lost, and will never be found.

Achievements

John Colter, unknown to himself, prepared his place well in the history of his country. He has aptly been called the "Ulysses of the Rockies." He was the first American to ever set foot into what is now Wyoming. His Yellowstone discoveries have made him famous for all time. His record with Lewis and Clark stands as a

high testimonial of his services to his country, and the great escape he registered against the Blackfeet Indians stands unparalleled in America.

Deserves Monument

About all this hero of the West ever received was the small amount of five dollars per month from the government for his services with Lewis and Clark. Slowly, but surely, the fame of John Colter is rising today, and he richly deserves a monument at Dundee or in the Yellowstone National Park, in memory of him, who gave so much and received so little. We regard him as the greatest historical character and the most famous man buried in the soil of Franklin County, Missouri.



Book Reviews

PONY TRAILS IN WYOMING. By John K. Rollinson. (Caldwell: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1941, 410 pp. \$3.50)

This book is a day-by-day and season-by-season autobiography of a cowboy's life in the days when Wyoming was a cattleman's paradise. Starting life as a ranch hand, the author worked at trapping, bone gathering, and at herding the town cows during his first year in the West. Then came his chance to become a full-fledged cowboy—to ride and "punch" cows.

As night herder of the cavvy he soon proved his worth and was given the responsibility of a regular cow hand. Then came marriage, and with it a desire to be off for the Big Horn Basin where advantages were greater and experiences more thrilling.

Here he freighted, trailed cattle, and broke horses. Later he and his wife became two of the first settlers in Cody. But the call of the open range soon found the author in the saddle again and riding for other cattle outfits. He became a forest guard, and later became the first official United States Forest Ranger on the Bear-tooth plateau.

Such a book as this, with its vivid illustrations of rolling prairies and shining mountains, is a true contribution to Wyoming literature and fills one with admiration for the old West.

Fort Philip Kearny.

MRS. CHARLES D. SCHREIBEIS

THE CHEYENNE WAY, by Karl N. Elwell and E. Adamson Hoebel. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941. x + 360 pp. Illustrations and Case-Finder, \$3.00.)

This book is another fine contribution to "*The Civilization of the American Indian Series*." It is a conflict and case-law in primitive jurisprudence, and the reader will soon see a resemblance in the sociological development of the Cheyennes with that of the ancient Israelites.

The Israelites had conceived on one God, Jehovah, had developed a council known as the Sanhedran, and used the Ark of the Covenant which contained their decalog and other holy articles.

The Cheyennes, on the other hand, had conceived of one God, Maiyum, had developed the Great Council, used the Holy Bundle which contained the Medicine Hat.

Unlike the Israelites, the Cheyennes did not possess a written language, and could not include in their Holy Bundle anything which would resemble the decalog. They had, however, developed folk-sages with legal principles which were fundamental

to them, and similar to some of the principles found in the decalog of the Israelites for they honored their parents, observed chastity, did not steal from each other, and seldom committed murder within the tribe.

This book represents the realistic approach to the social sciences through the technique of the American case lawyer, and from these cases the reader will glean episodes of camp and tribe life which contain the principles of representative government. It will appeal especially to the sociologist and to the lawyer. It will be a surprise to the general reader to learn that the same Cheyennes who helped to defeat Colonel Fetterman's detachment near Fort Philip Kearny have built up a system of social responsibility, and governmental policy which is distinct in form and culture from that of any other tribe of plains Indians.

Fort Philip Kearny

CHARLES D. SCHREIBEIS



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When bleak Wintry days are over
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3. **CUSTER AND THE GALL SAGA**, by Charles Kuhlman
46 pages, 1 map, 5¼x7¾ inches, flexible 1.00
4. **FORT PHIL. KEARNY**, by Elsa Spear
36 pages, 10 photographs, 5x7 inches, flexible 1.00
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Smith Luce, well illustrated, 6x8 inches, cloth 3.00
9. **SONS OF THE WEST**, by Lorah B. Chaffin, 320 pages,
6 x 8 7/8 inches, cloth..... 3.00
10. **PONY TRAILS IN WYOMING**, by John K. Rollinson
408 pages, 44 illustrations, 6¼ x 9¼ inches, cloth.....3.50

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